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AUTHOR Curry, Barbara K.; Houser, Neil O.
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ABSTRACT

Asserting that fear and misunderstanding about religion in public education precludes reflection and compromise needed to promote societal well-being, this paper examines the current status of religion in U.S. public education and considers implications for policy making and practice. A brief history of religion in public education and two recent cases challenging education policy in Pennsylvania and New York are used to frame the discussion. The paper concludes with a proposal for a "moderate secularism," an alternative approach to policy and practice based upon a language of possibility for addressing religion in public education. Such an alternative would neither be sectarian (insofar as it would not be partisan) nor secular (insofar as it would not abstain from meaningful spiritual investigation and religious inquiry). (Contains 31 references.) (LH)

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MODERATE SECULARISM: CONSTRUCTING A LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITY FOR RELIGION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Barbara K. Curry

Assistant Professor

University of Delaware

Neil O. Houser

Assistant Professor

University of Delaware

SO 026 890

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Neil O. Houser

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MODERATE SECULARISM: CONSTRUCTING A LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITY FOR RELIGION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Abstract

People often resist that which they fear or misunderstand. When this resistance precludes the reflection and compromise needed to promote societal well-being, it becomes a legitimate focus of social education. Nowhere has the fear been greater or the resistance more rigid than in the debate over religion in public education. This paper examines the current status of religion in education and considers the implications for policy making and practice. A brief history of religion in education and two recent cases challenging educational policy are used to frame the discussion. The paper concludes with a proposal for a "moderate secularism," an alternative approach to policy and practice based upon a language of possibility for addressing religion in public education.

MODERATE SECULARISM: CONSTRUCTING A LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITY FOR RELIGION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

People often resist that which they fear or misunderstand (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). When this resistance precludes the self-reflection and personal compromise needed to promote societal well-being, it becomes a legitimate focus of social education (Baldwin, 1988; Banks, 1987; Kohl, 1988). Nowhere has the fear been greater--or the resistance more rigid--than in the debate over the role of religion in public education (Kaplan, 1994; Marzano, 1993/1994; McQuaide & Pliska, 1993/1994; Noddings, 1992; Provenzo, 1990; Rippa, 1992; Slattery, 1995). As with many controversial problems, addressing the fear and resistance related to religion in education requires new forms of thought and discussion (Greene, 1988; Giroux, 1985). In the words of Giroux, it requires "a discourse that combines the language of critique with the language of possibility" (1985, p. 379).

This paper examines the current status of the debate over religion in education and considers the implications for policy making and practice. The critique begins with a brief review of the history of religion in American education. It continues with two examples of challenges to educational policy in Pennsylvania and New York. The discussion concludes with a proposal for a "moderate secularism," an alternative approach to policy and practice based upon a language of possibility for addressing religion in public education.

A Brief History of Religion in Education

Throughout our nation's history, the relationship between religion and education has been complex, multifaceted and continuously evolving. Among other factors, it has been influenced by

prevailing religious doctrines, varying cultures and social conditions, competing political and economic interests, and legal precedents and parameters established by the courts. Many public policies and current educational practices are grounded in the views of early American leaders, the Constitutional laws that emerged from those views, and subsequent judicial decisions. The separation of church and state, for example, is rooted in the determination to maintain, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man" (quoted in Rippa, 1992, p. 68).1 To that end, the First Amendment was framed: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Although general parameters have been established by the legal system, these guidelines are often insufficient to address the countless, complicated issues that arise each day within particular educational contexts. Even seemingly unambiguous doctrines such as the separation of church and state have failed to provide clear consensus on the role of religion in American education (Rippa, 1992). The nature of the problem can be more clearly understood by briefly examining historical issues and recent developments related to religion in public education.

Debates over the role of religion in public education have existed for centuries (Rippa, 1992; Zinn, 1990). Even before the founding of the United States, opinions regarding religion and education varied among European colonists. While many northern colonists viewed education as a vehicle for evangelism, southern colonists typically believed religion was a private matter for church and family rather than a civic or governmental responsibility (Rippa, 1992). Although a variety of factors (e.g., internal migration, changing economic conditions) have blurred the boundaries, ongoing social relationships, prevailing religious activities, and persistent political trends nonetheless indicate that significant regional distinctions continue to exist even in

the waning years of the twentieth century.

In addition to regional differences, the debate over religion in education has been fueled by increased population growth, the cultural diversification of the Nation, industrial and technological developments, increased urbanization, a shrinking middle class, and so forth. In response to these changing conditions, both religious and educational institutions have sought to assimilate diverse populations into the prevailing structures, norms and practices of society (Baldwin, 1988; Banks, 1987; Kohl, 1988; Ogbu, 1987; Rippa, 1992). Insofar as these efforts have imposed religious ideologies and denied religious freedoms, they have often met with fierce opposition.

Finally, ideological divisions have slowly increased through gradual shifts from religion to reason (Rippa, 1992), evolving theories of multiple intelligences and diverse ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Gardner, 1985; Sternberg, 1987), and a growing belief that reality, "morality" and even spirituality may be socially constructed rather than absolute (Berger, 1967; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The gradual evolution of the Age of Reason, emphasizing the need and ability of humans to understand, control and improve themselves and their environment, has posed a significant threat to those who advocate complete faith in (a particular interpretation of the will of) God and the relinquishing of personal control over one's own life in favor of (a particular version of) God's will (Peshkin, 1986; Provenzo, 1990).

In addition to the growing emphasis on human ability to understand, interpret and improve oneself and one's environment through rational thought, some scholars have begun to develop theories of multiple intelligence and alternative ways of knowing. For example, theorists such as Belenky, et al. (1986) have argued that women's ways of knowing are often qualitatively different

(e.g., private, intuitive, connected) but no less important than the rational, technocratic approaches to understanding that have long been privileged in our society. Similarly, individuals such as Gardner (1985) and Sternberg (1987) have described multiple forms of intelligence based upon differing natural propensities and varying sociocultural experiences and conditions. An important implication of this work is that, since different forms of intelligence serve different but equally important functions, primacy should not be accorded to any particular way of knowing. To the extent that these views seem to challenge the existence of an ultimate source of truth and authority, they too are seen by many as a threat to religion.

One of the greatest challenges to the religious right is the assertion that reality itself is socially constructed and context specific rather than predetermined and absolute (Berger, 1967; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The assumption that ideas (including the concept of "God") are created by people rather than people by ideas poses a clear challenge to creationist beliefs, ideologies based on salvation through divine grace, and so forth.

Scholars such as Peshkin (1986) and Provenzo (1990) have argued that ultra-fundamentalist perspectives constitute closed belief systems that intentionally shut out external influences which they perceive as a threat to their versions of "Absolute Truth." In his ethnographic study of a Christian fundamentalist school, Peshkin (1986) demonstrated that the educational approach was not intended to promote balance and inquiry. Rather, within this setting, schooling was designed to provide students with absolute values and a rigid point of view. Provenzo (1990) explains that ultra-fundamentalists have increasingly imposed their views on the public schools largely in an effort to regain the status and respect that have gradually eroded over the last several decades.

> Although the Social Revolution of the 1960s empowered many individuals, it also diminished the influence and authority of those whose cultural and social values had predominated up until that time (1990, p. 88) 2

Thus, gradual social changes related to the Age of Reason, the prospect of multiple intelligences, and socially constructed realities have posed a steadily growing threat to narrowly defined religions doctrines. In combination with the demographic and structural changes occurring since the colonization of America, these factors have fueled renewed resistance from the religious right (Kaplan, 1994; Marzano, 1993/1994; McQuaide & Pliska, 1993/1994; Peshkin, 1986; Provenzo, 1990; Slattery, 1995). To the extent that educators have dared address these developments in public schools, opposition has neared the breaking point.

As a result of the volatility and complexity of the debate over religion in public education, many philosophical arguments and legislative actions intended to clarify the issue have actually exacerbated the overall confusion. Depending upon where they position themselves, for example, some people currently contend that the First Amendment prohibits all attention to religion in public education. Others argue that the restriction of religious practice, such as organized prayer in school, violates "the free exercise thereof." The debate has intensified and captured wider interest in the midst of the conservative shift in Congressional power and new promises (e.g., the "Contract with America") vying for public trust.

To the extent that particular religious perspectives have served the interests of some while restricting opportunities for others, the role of religion in education has become increasingly contentious (Kaplan, 1994; Marzano, 1993/1994; Peshkin, 1986; Provenzo, 1990; Rippa, 1992;

Slattery, 1995; Zinn, 1990). And to the extent that the debate has itself exacerbated initial ideological and practical divisions, it is apparent that American educators need to develop new ways of thinking and talking about the relationship between religion and education.

Recent Developments on Religion in Public Education

Although most public educators have maintained a distance between sectarian doctrines and public educational systems, this separation has perhaps never before been so vocally and forcefully challenged. Dialogue about the possibility of maintaining the separation of church and state as it relates to the school curriculum has been all but lost in the distance between groups that support the infusion of Christianity in education and those who believe public education must be responsive to a multiplicity of needs. Nowhere has this debate resounded more loudly than in Pennsylvania's recent furor over "Outcomes-Based Education."

Pennsylvania became a forum for debating these issues when the State Board of Education revised its statute, focusing on educational "outcomes" rather than clock hours. Other states intending to implement similar changes watched the drama unfold as educators and citizens debated the meaning and merit of outcomes such as "tolerance of differences" and "respect for diversity" (McQuaide & Pliska, 1993/1994). Christian fundamentalist organizations from around the country organized to establish a presence at Pennsylvania's public hearings on school change (Kappan, 1994; McQuaide & Pliska, 1993/1994).

In a less prominent but equally significant case, the Board of Education for the state of New York joined the debate when it permitted the creation of a district "co-terminus" with an Hasidic religious community. The community, and therefore the district, was bound to a

particular gender-related religious doctrine. This orthodoxy became an issue when a school bus driver brought charges of discrimination because she was not permitted to pick up and transport male students to school (Board of Education of Kiryas Joel Village School District v. Grumet, 114 S. Ct. 2481). The case sparked a vigorous debate over the constitutionality of public support for a system in which the community, and therefore the district, were bound to a particular religious doctrine. Unlike other prominent cases, the Hasidic community represented a minority religious perspective within the United States. Therefore, rather than the familiar issue of protecting minority groups from dominant forms of religious imposition, this case addressed the responsibility of the general public to provide educational environments that do not prohibit religious freedom.

Like other social and philosophical developments, recent cases such as these have contributed to the debate over religion in education. On the one hand, the religious right has denounced the left for advocating "immorality, situation ethics, outcomes-based education, sex education without moral values, school-based clinics promoting birth control and abortion, euthanasia, child rights and on and on" (Martin, 1994, p. 7--quoted in Slattery, 1995). On the other hand, the left derides the Christian Right as "the self-appointed conscience of American society. Without its unique brand of divinely inspired goading, its leaders believe, the nation is destined to sink into the compost heaps of atheism and secular humanism" (Kaplan, 1994).

Based on cases such as those in Pennsylvania and New York, many states have begun to ask with renewed concern: Is secularism always the best approach for providing educational services to the general public? Although policy and practice in public education have been heavily influenced by the United States Constitution and subsequent court decisions, it has become

increasingly clear that the relation between religion and education is too complex and controversial to be managed by legislation alone.

A Sectarian Curriculum in Pennsylvania

Each year for more than a decade Pennsylvania's Board of Education has reviewed its public school regulations (Chapters Three, Five, and Six related to student testing, curriculum, and vocational education respectively). Few modifications other than those influenced by a continuous flow of federal changes attached to titled funding resulted from that review. The State's last attempt to substantially change its regulations was in 1983, following the publication of "A Nation at Risk." At that time, the State added high school graduation requirements, vocational education requirements, and the monitoring of skills development to its statutes. The requirements included 120 hours of courses, and the monitoring process included basic skills testing in the third, fifth, and eighth grades.

The 1983 changes were later described by the State Board as isolated and without thoughtful connections to other parts of the curriculum. There was a 50% decline in vocational education enrollments, a modest increase in higher level mathematics in the curriculum, and significant increases in attempts to develop lower level cognitive skills. The majority of students graduated unprepared for college or work. Based upon these and related observations, the 1983 modifications were deemed largely ineffective, and in 1989 the board began a statewide attempt to revise the curricular components of its regulations. It combined chapters three, five and six under a new chapter. The new chapter, Chapter Five, included curriculum, student assessment, and vocational education related to curriculum and assessment.

According to its executive director, the Pennsylvania Board of Education spent the first year of the three-year process listening to what people had to say about education in general, and education in Pennsylvania in particular. After reviewing the state's regulations, the Board asked: What should states regulate? What should be regulated elsewhere? Is it possible to define what constitutes an educated citizen and then design regulations to help produce those citizens?

After extensive internal review and careful consideration of several other states (e.g., Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, and Virginia) in the process of change, the Board decided to delineate related learning outcomes for its students. It saw this as a much needed attempt to influence teaching as well as curriculum. The changes were consistent with the state's tradition of home rule and local control of schools. The Board convened meetings throughout the state to gather public commentary on its new regulations. At those meetings, constituencies with divergent interests began to emerge. One of the major criticisms of the State Board's learning-outcomes was that they contained values that many parents and religious groups believed were unchristian or that should be addressed at home rather than in school.

While the Board believed it was appropriate and timely to codify the responsibilities of schools, groups opposing the proposed legislation argued that many of the specified goals represented values that should be optional, decided locally, or taught at home according to parental predilection. They charged the state with attempting to establish a curriculum based on religious "secular humanism." Several community groups (e.g., Citizens for Excellence in Education; Pennsylvania Conference for Academic Excellence; Pennsylvania Parents Commission) took aggressive social and political action on behalf of the people they claimed to represent. For

example, the Citizens for Excellence in Education disseminated a document containing the following excerpt:

> We are Citizens for Excellence in Education in Pennsylvania. We are parents, teachers, businessmen and business women. In short, we are a representative sample of citizens and taxpayers from across the Commonwealth....After analyzing the proposals, we realized the changes suggested by the Board of Education would, in effect, remove local control of our schools from our elected representatives and put it in the hands of the State Board...."Ethical Judgment" and "Adaptability to Change" do not address the lack of literacy skills. Enforcing politically correct views through "Appreciating and Understanding Others" will not assist students acquiring the skills necessary to fill out a job or college application... (Excerpted from a document distributed by Citizens for Excellence in Education/Erie, 1992, p. 1-11.)

Another quotation from the same source addressed the issue of secular humanism more directly. It also represents the kind of powerful and menacing images of the Board that were being constructed.

> The educational system is an efficient means of turning this generation's thinking toward a world community. Can you think of a better way to break the foundations of the family, national sovereignty and belief in God, which, if left in place, would destroy any hope for the fulfillment of a New World Order? Why deal with the wise-to-the-world adult when there are innocent, naive hearts to be

had? (Excerpted from a document distributed by Citizens for Excellence in Education/Erie, 1992, p.11)

Thus, acting on what they believed were religious and spiritual imperatives, parent and religious groups lobbied under the banner of home rule for school prayer and the infusion of Christian values in the curriculum. Finally, in January 1993, after a three-year development process, the Pennsylvania Board of Education adopted the Outcome-Based Education regulations (see also Curry, 1994; Zahorchak and Boyd, 1994). In the end, the outcomes most closely related to values such as "respect" and "tolerance" for others had been significantly modified to comply with the pressures brought to bear by the religious right.

The essential point of the Pennsylvania case is that a relatively small but highly vocal and well-organized group of citizens was able problematize--and to an extent, modify--the secular education proscribed by the state. In the next case, the challenge to the separation of church and state came from citizens on both sides of the debate over the role of religion in schooling.

A Sectarian School District in New York

A less prominent but equally significant case involved a disagreement between the Kiryas Joel Village School District and the New York State School Boards Association. This dispute has a substantial history. The Kiryas Joel Village, located in Orange County, New York, is a religious community of Satmar Hasidim, practitioners of a strict form of Judaism. Yiddish is the principal language of the Kiryas Joel; television, radio and English-language publications are not generally used. The dress and appearance of the Hasidim are distinctive. Young men wear side

curls, head coverings and special garments. Both men and women follow prescribed dress codes. The group lives apart from other members of the Monroe-Woodbury School District, and young men and women are educated separately in parochial schools.

From the perspective of the Kiryas Joel, the community's religious practices were jeopardized by secular education. The community needed special education services for its children; however, it maintained that its children could not be sent to public schools where those services were available. To do so violated their religious tenants. To resolve the longstanding dispute over the special needs of the children of Kiryas Joel, the 1989 New York Board of Education established Chapter 748, a compromise was reached between this group and the state legislature. A statute was created which permitted the Hasidic community to form the Kiryas Joel Village School District, a public school district whose boundaries were coterminous with the Hasidic religious community.

This action was expected to quiet the dispute; however, it created another. Citizens outside that community believed their rights, ordinarily protected by a government neutral in its treatment of religion, were abridged by this statutorily created parochial school district. Several months before the new district began operation, the New York State School Board Association, along with two individuals named Grumet and Hawk, brought legal action against the state education department and state officials challenging the new statute (114 S. Ct. 2481). The parties charged that the statute violated the national and state constitutions as "an unconstitutional establishment of religion" (114 S. Ct. 2481).

On November 29, 1993 the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case of the Board of Education of Kiryas Joel Village School District v. Grumet (114 S. Ct. 2481). The court's

decision to hear the case was viewed as "an opportunity to revamp the strict Church-State separation rules it set down in 1971" (Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602, 91 S. Ct. 2105, 29 L. Ed. 2d 745) (NPR, 11, 1993). Although the court questioned the law as set forth in the Lemon decision, there had previously been insufficient agreement to overturn it. Social commentators predicted that with judiciary retirements and the appointment of more conservative judges, the court would eventually overturn the decision.

The Lemon decision provided a three pronged test in order to determine whether the establishment clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution had been violated. The test questioned whether laws or actions had "a secular purpose," whether their "principal or primary effect advanc[ed] or inhibit[ed] religion," and whether they resulted in "excessive governmental entanglement with religion" (187 A.D. 2D 16, 592 N.Y.S. 2D. 123). The court ruled in favor of the Association, Grumet and Hawk, upholding the doctrine of the separation of church and state.

Attorneys for Kiryas Joel appealed the decision, but it was affirmed on the ground that Chapter 748, in effect, advanced religion and violated the doctrine of the separation of church and state. Because the district's student population and board members were exclusively Hasidic, "the statute created a 'symbolic union of church and state' that was 'likely perceived by the Satmar Hasidim as an endorsement of their religious choices, or by nonadherents as a disapproval' of their own" (114 S. Ct. 2481).

The United States Supreme Court granted certiorari and ruled that the statute creating a district coterminous with the village lines violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment (114 S. Ct. 2481). The Court's decision was based on a vote of six to three, with

Justices Scalia, Rehnquist, and Thomas casting the dissenting votes. Therefore, for the majority of the court, the expectation that governmental institutions and religious establishments operate in different spheres of public life remains a guiding tenant of American democracy (114 S. Ct. 2481). Government cannot legislate in favor of a particular group, and state and federal roles in the lives of the citizenry are to remain neutral regarding matters of religion that do not violate civil codes. The message from the court was clear--the separation between church and state will not be bridged in favor of a particular religious sect.

For the purposes of this discussion, the key point of the New York case is that even though the Kiryas Joel constituted a majority within their district (unlike the religious right in Pennsylvania), their religious practices nonetheless excluded some of their neighbors from full and equal participation in educational services provided through public funds. By rejecting the coterminous status of the Kiryas Joel Village School District, the Court once again upheld the prevailing principle of separation of church and state.

Although the Pennsylvania and New York cases differed in many respects, they were congruent in at least two important ways. First, both cases focused on the central tension between the right of free worship for all citizens and the restriction of those rights by particular groups. In Pennsylvania, the challenge came from Christian fundamentalist groups who believe secular curriculum practices have taken schooling far afield of their own religious doctrines. While the Kiryas Joel did not attempt to impose their beliefs upon their neighbors, the exclusion of their neighbors from the district brought local and state government into religious affairs and technically jeopardized the education of any citizen whose religious practices were not represented.

The second similarity is that a concerted and highly effective effort was made in each case to use the state's policy venues to question the role of religion in public education. In essence, both cases served to politicize and once again direct public attention to the issue of religion in education. Although the principle of separation of church and state was ultimately upheld in each of these cases, the tensions have not subsided and the debate remains clearly unresolved.

Current Challenges and Questions

While the religious right may envision the development of an immoral society created by the imposition of undesirable values such as "tolerance" and "secular humanism," others from the left fear a future in which our country, like other nations, may be divided along religious rather than political party lines. In such a time, new liberals would be individuals advocating religious freedom for all Americans. Such concerns continue to grow today as the vocal and ever present group to the right of the American mainstream is courted by conservative politicians such as the proponents of the "Contract With America."

Although the Contract with America does not specifically include school prayer, a school prayer amendment has been developed as a collateral proposal (USA Today, November 15, 1994, 3A). In the meantime, silent prayer is the preferred forum for challenging the separation of church and state. While these mandates come at high costs (e.g., a teacher in Georgia was fired for ignoring his district's silent prayer statute, and a principal in Mississippi was fired for his efforts to support school prayer, USA Today, November 15, 1994, 3A), the larger point is that challenges to the separation of church and state persist in spite of recent court cases such as those in Pennsylvania and New York.

Significant considerations crowd the discussion on secular education. Who will pray? How will they pray? What happens to individuals who choose not to pray or to bear witness to others' acts of prayer? And, how can advocates on both sides safeguard against distilling the act to an essential Americanism akin to saluting the flag with refusal considered an act of treason?

If schools educate for citizenship, who defines citizenship in contemporary American society? Does that definition include tolerance for differences? Where do lessons of citizenship and tolerance begin? Whether they begin at home or at school, schools eventually play an important role in those lessons.

In summary, the current debate over religion in education appears to represent polar extremes. On the one hand, fear of the inculcation of particular religious views has justifiably reinforced the doctrine of the separation of church and state in cases such as those in Pennsylvania and New York. However, precisely because the issue is so intense, complex and socially embedded, the debate over the role of religion in public education cannot simply be legislated away. Given the pervasiveness of the problem, the relationship between religion and education must ultimately be addressed in a language that leads to the consideration of new possibilities. Thus, the final section of this paper offers a framework for a language of possibility for addressing religion in public education.

Toward a Moderate Secularism: Implications for Policy and Practice

Among the numerous approaches that might be used to address the relationship between religion and education, neither of the extreme alternatives (i.e., inculcation of particular religious values or complete separation of church and state) seem acceptable. On the one hand, it is

inappropriate to use public education within a democratic and pluralistic society as a forum for inculcating morality. On the other hand, in a nation of citizens whose lives have been deeply influenced by varying religious perspectives, it seems that spirituality should be addressed in some capacity. Within such a society, it is difficult to imagine any credible program of social education (e.g., history, sociology) that does not include thoughtful examination of the role of religion on human lives. The challenge is to develop an approach equally responsive to those who believe religion must be included in public education and those who view religion in school as potentially dangerous.

Beyond modifying school curricula and instruction and beyond even the restructuring of governance and management systems, the problem of addressing religion in education calls for a fundamental restructuring of the debate itself. Like all substantive reformations, reforming the policies and practices of religion in education will require the development of a "language of possibility" (Giroux, 1985).

Between the extremes of sectarian indoctrination and "hands off" secular alternatives, it is possible to conceive of a third possibility that might be referred to as a "moderate secularism." Such an alternative would neither be sectarian (insofar as it is would not be partisan) nor secular (insofar as it would not abstain from meaningful spiritual investigation and religious inquiry). A "moderate secularism" could serve to initiate a dialogue of possibility for policy and practice.

Recognizing the fundamental importance of spiritual life to many Americans, a moderate secularism would embrace rather than avoid discussions about religion in the classroom. New York City's "Rainbow Curriculum" is an example of a recent educational reform effort that pushed toward a more rigorous and comprehensive critique of the dominant social norms

underlying religious (and other) traditions without actually "teaching" religion. Similarly, Noddings (1992) has addressed the possibility of investigating various aspects of religion and spirituality through the social studies curriculum. Consistent with these examples, a moderate secularism would reject the advocacy of specific religious perspectives while promoting critical investigation into the nature of spirituality itself and authentic inquiry into the philosophical aspects of various forms of religion.

Several highly interrelated themes are central to the notion of a moderate secularism. First and most important, a moderate secularism in public education would include spiritual inquiry. Rather than sanitizing the curriculum with politically safe and unambiguous (and therefore unchallenging) information, substantive religious inquiry would be an essential part of public education. This would be reflected in policy and practice deliberations extending from daily instruction to state-level board meetings.

This first theme, the inclusion of religious inquiry in the school curriculum, cannot exist without four additional themes--plurality, equality, inquiry and authenticity--that contextualize and support the original premise. A moderate secularism recognizes that pluralistic societies such as our own reflect a variety of needs and concerns as well as multiple intelligences and ways of knowing. Within such a society, it is necessary to address the needs of all groups and individuals. This is perhaps best achieved by valuing and nurturing rather than seeking to standardize (e.g., through cultural assimilation, Banks, 1987, Ogbu, 1987) the multiple intelligences and perspectives represented in our society. Just as a plurality of perspectives and abilities in community polity can provide a basis for national strength and mutual well-being, serious academic inquiry into a variety of religious perspectives can broaden, strengthen and otherwise

facilitate social development and personal growth.

In addition to investigating different religious views and issues from a variety of perspectives, moderate secularism is also egalitarian. Therefore, no religious perspective should be more heavily represented than the others. A moderate secularism would reject from the outset the assumption that religious representation in the curriculum should be commensurate with the given community, school or classroom population.

Consistent with the principles of constructivist learning theory, a moderate secularism assumes that psychological development involves contemplating ideas that differ from one's existing beliefs (Piaget, 1972; Kamii, 1984). Applied to the study of religion, this suggests that Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics, atheists, and so forth would each benefit by struggling to understand the arguments of the others. Insofar as the goal is education through critical inquiry rather than uncritical indoctrination, a moderate secularism would strive for a balanced representation of religious perspectives regardless of the prevailing religious orientations within the local community.

Beyond advocating balanced investigation of a variety of religious issues and orientations, a moderate secularism would focus on inquiry rather than application. The overall focus would be academic in nature. Rather than learning particular practices, the explicit focus would be to gain a better understanding of the philosophical orientations, premises, histories and struggles of a variety of religious traditions. Instead of concentrating on specific rituals and routines, educators would help their students examine broader concepts of spirituality and historical religious developments across varied social and cultural settings.

Finally, moderate secularism is authentic. It is not an attempt to debunk religion through

scientific investigation or to ridicule one orientation while exalting another. A moderate secularism must operate from a position of humility rather than certainty. In the words of Giroux (1985), a moderate secularism would seek to balance a language of critique with a language (and attitude) of possibility. Diverse perspectives would be presumed meritorious based on the insights they provide about the beliefs and actions of various individuals and groups in society. To the extent that religion influences the views and actions of countless members of society, meaningful education requires attention not only to a variety of social, cultural and political perspectives, but to alternative religious orientations as well.

Thus, a moderate secularism embodies at least five fundamental themes, including: (1) inclusion rather than the avoidance of religion in education, (2) plurality of religious orientations based on the premises of constructed realities and multiple ways of knowing, (3) equal representation and investigation of these approaches regardless of the particular makeup of the community, (4) explicit focus on philosophical investigation rather than practical application, and (5) a standard of authenticity that balances the attitudes of critique and possibility. Each of these themes represents a necessary part of the whole. In the absence of any of these, "moderate secularism" would not exist.

Summary and Conclusion

The moderate secularism we have described differs from typical approaches in public education. Rather than omitting religion from the curriculum as is usually the case, moderate secularism advocates serious and sustained attention to the study of religion. Unlike existing situations such as Outcomes-Based Education in Pennsylvania and Kiryas Joel in New York in

which religious preferences and biases are perpetuated through acts of omission and commission, moderate secularism advocates thoughtful and balanced inquiry into a variety of spiritual issues and perspectives. While no local perspective would be excluded (as the opponents of Outcomes-Based Education sought to do by omitting discussions of "values"), nor would public funds be used to support the privileging of one orientation over another (as was the case with the Kiryas Joel Village School District). Authentic, academic inquiry into a variety of religious perspectives, histories and social conditions would serve as the basis for the religious curriculum in public education.

Each of the themes--inclusion, plurality, egalitarianism, inquiry and authenticity--is significant for policy making and practice in public education. For example, the principle of inclusion implies that religion should be considered both in governance meetings and in curriculum development and lesson planning. Based on the principles of inclusion and authenticity, religious fundamentalists (such as the opponents of Outcomes-Based Education) could be assured that many of their views would be addressed in meaningful ways in the curriculum. On the other hand, the principles of plurality and equality would help assure that the same groups could not veto the inclusion of perspectives (e.g., tolerance) that diverge from their own ideals. While their "Absolute" belief systems might prevent many ultra-fundamentalists from choosing to participate in any form of public education that affirms diversity and mutual respect, the essential point is that they could choose to participate and that their views would be examined with the same care and scrutiny as any other religious orientation.

The issue of religion in education is as important today as it was during the settlement of the "New World." As the nation has gradually evolved, the issue has become progressively

complex and ideological divisions increasingly intense. The escalation of the debate over religion in public education suggests that educators can ill-afford to ignore this important issue. Although court decisions establish important parameters, they cannot address the countless differences in perspective and practice that characterize a nation such as our own. The alternative to ignoring the situation is to address it, and the alternative to endless oppositional debate is the development of a language of possibility for addressing religion in education.

"Moderate secularism," as a framework for philosophical inquiry and a mechanism for policy making and practice, allows for the development of a more comprehensive approach for coping with the difficult religious issues facing our changing society. A moderate secularism acknowledges the need to study rather than avoid the influence of spirituality upon the lives of Americans. At the same time, it recognizes that a democratic society must never concede to the imposition of particular religious perspectives and practices upon its pluralistic body. Like all proposals addressing difficult educational issues, the views we have expressed will require further dialogue. It is our hope that the concept of a "moderate secularism" will help generate such dialogue and promote a meaningful exploration of new possibilities for the role of religion in public education.

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Footnotes

1. It is important to note that Jefferson considered himself a religious person. His concerns had more to do with the potential for governmental abuse of religion than with the mere existence of religious perspectives and practices.

2. While acknowledging the problems "Absolute" belief systems pose for public education within a pluralistic and democratic society, both Peshkin and Provenzo contend that the continued existence of alternative perspectives--even closed perspectives such as those of the ultra-fundamentalist--is a important testimony to the health of the ideological plurality within our nation.